

Mr. President, our nation has been at war for nearly a decade now in Afghanistan and nearly as long in Iraq and we owe a huge debt of gratitude to the men and women who have fought on the front lines as well as to their families who have sacrificed so much.

The Senate is considering S.1963, the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2009. While I will support its passage, I believe this legislation represents a significant failure of Congress to uphold the responsibility entrusted to us by the citizens of this nation and our obligation to military families and taxpayers.

While there will be self-congratulating press releases from members of Congress and some Veteran Service Organization lauding the bill's passage, I believe the shortcomings of this legislation—discriminating against most veterans and adding billions of dollars to our national debt—represent a failure of leadership and lack of responsibility.

I had hoped that the House of Representatives would make some significant improvements to the legislation over the Senate. Sadly, they did not.

The legislation that the Senate will consider still unfairly discriminates against severely disabled veterans from wars and combat prior to September 11, 2001.

Many of these brave men and women have needed the assistance of caregivers for decades and have done so without help from the Department of Veterans Affairs. Many of these veterans were not the beneficiary of recent advancements in military medical care. The caregivers of these veterans will be left out of this benefits package.

There are currently 35,000 veterans receiving aid and attendance benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs, which is approximately the number of veterans in need of caregiver assistance. Out of this population, around 2,000 veterans received their injuries after September 11 and would qualify for extra caregiver assistance in this bill.

Caregivers for almost 95% of severely disabled veterans from combat would not receive the level of caregiver assistance afforded to those veterans who were injured after September 11, 2001. When I offered an amendment that would provide equivalent caregiver benefits for all severely disabled veterans of all wars, the Senate summarily rejected that idea.

Unfortunately the House of Representatives also ignored the danger that our massive debt poses to our nation and did not eliminate or reduce any current programs in the federal budget to pay for this legislation. The bill is not paid for by trimming any wasteful, duplicative, obsolete, or lower priority federal programs.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates that the bill will cost \$3.6 billion over five years, which is slightly less than the version the Senate passed. The Senate also rejected my attempt to pay for this legislation out of the fraud, waste, and abuse of taxpayer dollars that we send each year to the United Nations.

Instead the Congress has decided, as it always does, to pass the debt onto our children and grandchildren, rather than bear the cost and sacrifice today as our veterans have done.

I fear that if we do not start paying for new spending then the sacrifice made by our veterans for future generations will have been in vain. At some point, the debt we are incurring today must be paid for and when that day comes, the promises we are making to veterans, caregivers, and others will no longer be affordable because Congress refused to be responsible by being fiscally responsible by trimming lower priority spending.

When the Senate first considered this legislation last fall, some of the proponents of the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act attempted to rebut my facts about our growing national debt by saying that the bill does not actually appropriate any money for these programs.

In a technical sense, they are correct. I suspect that these same proponents will issue statements celebrating its passage, which will disappoint any caregiver of a disabled veteran expecting the promised assistance soon.

No caregiver will be helped unless the appropriations committee allocates the funding for this new program authorized in this bill.

Until then, this bill is an empty promise to veterans and benefits no one except perhaps the career politicians who will claim credit for doing something to help veterans without really having to make any difficult choices.

We owe an enormous sacrifice to our veterans who fought and died in our defense. This debt, which was incurred on a battlefield far from home, should be borne by this generation so that we ensure that the future they fought to secure for our children and grandchildren is not threatened by our own fiscal irresponsibility and shortsightedness.

Congress has once again failed taxpayers, veterans, and their families today.